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ABSTRACT

Ways in which colleges and universities can address the needs of off-campus students are presented in this report of a regional conference. The report is offered as a model for similar conferences. Following a brief description of the conference format, ideas are suggested for: (1) building and maintaining community liaisons and resources; (2) adapting traditional student services to the needs of off-campus students; (3) helping students find suitable and affordable housing; and (4) reaching off-campus students with publicity and information. (DC)

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Conference report:

Meeting needs of off-campus students

By Bill Moore
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I attended an exciting conference October 10-12 co-sponsored by the New York State Off-Campus Association and Commission XVII of ACPA, and I'd like to share my perceptions of what happened there. It was a valuable experience for me, and it seems to me that it represented an excellent model for the kind of regional "drive-in" conferences which should occur regularly across the country.

The conference was a 50-50 blend of staff and students, but all had one common goal — addressing the needs of off-campus students at their various (and varied) institutions. In addition to the rejuvenation people gained from meeting and talking with others who are dealing with the same, or similar, problems and issues as they were-are, the interchange of ideas which occurred both in and out of the regular sessions enabled everyone to gather new ideas, new ways of looking at old problems, and possibly some new solutions.

The sessions explored a number of critical issues for professionals working with off-campus students: "College (University)-Community relations" — how to build and maintain the liaisons and resources necessary to effectively serve as advocates for students living in the community; "Exploiting traditional student services" — ways to work with and reconsider student service functions in order to make them more responsive to the particular needs of various sub-group of off-campus students; "Housing of Students-the positive approach" — an outreach-oriented, positive model for helping students find suitable housing and apartments; "meeting the transportation needs of students"; "resolving student legal problems"; "Communications-Outreach and cheap, fun, innovative programs" — ways of reaching the off-campus student through a variety of publicity efforts, and some specific

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programming ideas that have proven successful; "Needs assessment and working with off-campus student sub-groups." All sessions included stimulus presentations followed by lengthy sharing of other ideas from other schools, and I was pleasantly surprised by the creative ideas from many participants throughout the sessions. My only experience with such a sharing format is from national conferences, and somehow the environment at such large gatherings does not seem to be as conducive to quality contributions as the small, informal setting at this regional conference.

The following is my attempt to organize a few of the ideas gleaned from the conference sessions, and I hope they make some sense to you. The conference organizers are hoping to compile a more detailed summary report eventually, which will be available from the Clearinghouse when available. Until then, here is my version:

College-Community Relations

• off-campus students' individual problems may include legal concerns, financial problems, tenant-landlord issues, community counseling, child care, etc.: do you have important information to give to them?

• build community liaisons face-to-face if possible, not on the phone-emphasize reciprocity.

• possible contacts: food stamp program, public defender's office, knowing regulations and guidelines, state agencies and subsidiaries for housing-winterization programs.

• programs: information sessions on-campus with various community agencies representatives, housing days with respectable landlords, winterization programs, co-operative education-sponsored workshops on relevant, life skills, "Town Days" focusing on student-community interactions.

Exploiting Traditional Student Services

• student activities might sponsor information sessions with community agencies relevant to off-campus students' needs.

• residence life might sponsor "moving off campus issues" programs in residence halls.

• commuter advisors can be trained with RAs so that all know both on-campus and off-campus issues.

• campus police could sponsor workshops on safety and self-defense, apartment protection, engraving valuables program, etc.

• counseling center might establish support groups for specific sub-groups of the off-campus students.

• information on important commuter-related issues should be available in offices across the campus which deal with them regularly.

Critical question: how much of a traditional, residential student mentality exists on your campus, and how can serious issues be **rethought** with off-campus students in mind? What, if anything, distinguishes your off-campus students from your on-campus students, how are the needs different, and how are they being met?

Housing Students Off-Campus: A Positive Approach

• needs assessment done with incoming students to determine kinds of housing desired, and with local landlords to see what's available.

• solicit listings through: list of landlords from tax collector's office, list of voters from election board, list of teachers from Board of Education, etc.

• determine where housing options are located (through computer demographic map, possibly).

• student-initiated "landlord appreciation" efforts.

• create markets in community: landlords who might build new places, "empty nesters" who might have rooms, parents who might buy a place for investment purposes.

• establish economic impact of students on community — how much do they spend, and on what?

• "Housing Assistance and Apartmentmate Selection Days" (Contact Carol Croons, SUNY College of Technology, 811 Court Street, Utica, NY 13501, or see **The Commuter**, vol. 5, no. 2)

Communication-Outreach — Programs

• programs that involve, or provide for, spouses and children and discuss off-campus concerns.

• class on "Student Involvement in College Community," or "Culture of the Commuter Student" to help raise general campus awareness.

• create identifiable logo for materials and programs.

• perhaps in consultation with geography or marketing departments, do demographic studies of area around university and showing concentration of students, type, etc.

• enlist students in areas like Urban Studies, Sociology, or Public Administration on projects related to off-campus issues.

• explore public service announcements (PSA's), as well as the public access channels available if you have a cable TV operative locally.

• establish specific locations on-campus for consistently placing notices.

This is only a partial list of sessions, and even for these listed I'm sure my memory and my notes are incomplete. Still, I hope it gives you a feel for the kinds of ideas we generated. I hope at least one of these ideas strikes a chord with each of you, and additionally, I hope it causes you to seriously consider the possibility of a similar conference in you own area. It doesn't have to be large or expensive to be successful, and this conference is solid evidence for that assertion.

If you are interested in such a conference, but are not quite sure how to go about it, contact the Clearinghouse, and we'll try to put you in touch with others in your area. Or, if you know the ACPA Commission XVII State Coordinator in your state, contact them and see what help they can be. Lastly, you may contact Jack Sperling, Off-Campus College, SUNY Binghamton, Binghamton, NY 13905, or Don Harrison, Assistant Director of Student Union, Hewitt Union, SUNY Oswego, Oswego, NY 13126. They coordinated the conference described herein and would be glad to share their experiences with you.